

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W

----- 118607

R 290710Z JAN 74

FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2462

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 ASMARA 0051

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS(1)

TAGS: PINT, PINS, ET

SUBJECT: INTERNAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING ERITREA

1. GOVERNOR GENERAL DEBBEBE HAILEMARIAM DEPARTED ASMARA IN NOVEMBER 1973 TO ACCOMPANY BODY OF NEPHEW (WHO HAD DIED HERE FROM CEREBRAL COMPLICATION) TO ADDIS ABABA FOR FUNERAL CEREMONIES. LENGTHY ABSENCE OF DEBBEBE HAS GIVEN RISE TO WIDE-SPREAD SPECULATION THAT HE IS DIS-ENCHANTED AND DISILLUSIONED WITH JOB AND WITH SITUATION IN ERITREA, AND THAT HE DOES NOT WISH TO RETURN. IN RECENT CONVERSATION WITH FORMER GOVERNOR GENERAL, RAS ASRATE KASSA, WHO CURRENTLY IS PRESIDENT OF THE CROWN COUNCIL, HE SAID DEBBEBE HAD VISITED HIM THE PREVIOUS DAY, AND CONFIRMED EXTREME DISILLUSIOMENT AND DFIRE FOR TRANSFER. DEBBEBE REPORTEDLY BELIEVES THAT HE HAS FLUBBED JOB AS GOVERNOR GENERAL, WHICH HE HAS HELD SINCE JANUARY 1971, AND THAT, DESPITE HIS EFFORTS AS THREE-STAR GENERAL ASSIGNED TO SERVE AS GOVERNOR GENERAL OF ERITREA UNDER PROVISIONS OF MARTIAL LAW ENACTED IN DECEMBER 1970, SITUAT

PN HERE HAS NOT REALLY IMPROVED AND IN FACT HAS DETERIORATED. DEBBEBE ATTRIBUTED HIS INEFFECTIVENESS TO NTWO PRINCIPAL CAUSES. FIRST, HE ERRED IN MAKING DECISION TO ISOLATE HIMSELF SOCIALLY AND CULTURALLY, AND THUS FROM FREQUENT POLITICAL CONTACTS WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS AND PEOPLE, SECONDLY, HIS DECISION TO OPERATE THROUGH TIGHT SECRET

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STAFF SYSTEM NOT ONLY CUT HIM OFF FROM FLOW OF IDEAS THAT CONTACTS WOULD HAVE BROUGHT, BUT ALSO LED TO HIS DECEIVEMENT BY STAFF WHICH FAILED TO REPORT BAD NEWS TO HIM ALONG WITH GOOD NEWS. IN ADDITIONA, DEBBEBE REPORTEDLY HAD BEEN

PROMISED STRONG SUPPORT BY PRIME MINISTER AKLILU TO PERMIT FORMULATIO APECMMV EMENTATION NEEDED SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM O.Y BUT IN FACT RECEIVE VIRTUALLY NO SUPPORT FROM THE PRIME MINISTER OR THE CABINET. MEANWHILE, ELF HAS ACHIEVED NOTABLE SUCCESS IN OBTAINING MEANINGFUL SUPPORT FROM LIBYA AND OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES, IN CONDUCTING PARA-MILITARY OPERATIONS IN COUNTRYSIDE ALONG WITH OCCASIONAL URBAN TERRORISM, AND, PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY, IN CREATING IMPRESSION AMONG PEOPLE OF ERITREA THAT IEG IS UNABLE TO OVERCOME ELF INITIATIVES AND UNABLE TO PROTECT PEOPLE AGAINST ELF.

2. CONSENSUS OF INFORMED THINKING IS THAT DEBBEBE PROBABLLK WILL RETURN TO ASMARA WITHIN NEXT WEEK OR SO INCIDENT TO VISIT BY EMPEROR TO ASMARA AND MASSAWA FOR NAVY DAYS DURING MID-FEBRUARY. SUBSEQUENTLY, THERE IS GENERAL EXPECTATION THAT DEBBEBE WILL BE TRANSFERRED. WHILE SOME BELIEVE HE MAY BE APPOINTED AS MINISTER OF DEFENSE, OTHERS CONSIDER THAT HIS EXCESSIVELY OPTIMISTIC REPORTS RELATING TO THE ELF DURING THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS HAVE RAISED QUESTIONS IN ADDIS ABABA ABOUT HIS JUDGMENT. IF HE IS NOT MADE MINISTER FO DEFENSE, HE CONCEIVABLY MAY BE APPOINTED AS AN AMBASSADOR RO SENATOR, BUT IN ANY EVENT, THE QUESTION OF WHAT TO DO WITH A THREE-STAR GENERAL WHO HAS WIDE-SPREAD SUPPORT IN THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT NO DOUBT WILL BE A SUBJECT OF CAREFUL CONSIDERATION BY THE EMPEROR.

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EXDIS

3. DURING THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS, THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER, POSSIBLY RELATED, POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS OF NOTE IN ERITREA. THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE INTERIOR DEPARTMENT (TEWOLDE TEDLA), THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF BUDGET AND PERSONNEL (MEDHANIE JOSEPH), AND THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT (YASIN ABERRA) HAVE BEEN APPOINTED AS ASSISTANT GOVERNORS GENERAL. THIS TENDS TO DILUTE THE POSITION OF VICE GOVERNOR

GENERAL TESFAIOHANNES BERHE, AND SUGGESTS THAT THE LATTER MAY BE UP EITHER FOR DESIGNATION AS GOVERNOR GENERAL OR FOR TRANSFER OUT OF ERITREA. HE PERSONALLY WOULD ALSO WELCOME A TRANSFER. UNWELCOME TRANSFERS OUT OF ERITREA HAVE BEEN ISSUED TO THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH (TEWOLDE WOLDEGHIORGHIS), THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF CUSTOMS (BEKELE WOLDE GIORGIS), THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF INFORMATION (TEWOLDEBERHAN GHEBREMEDHIN), AND THE HEAD OF THE RESEARCH AND PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT (MAMMO WODINEH). TEWOLDE OF PUBLIC HEALTH BELIEVES HIS TRANSFER WAS ENGINEERED BY THE DIRECTOR OF THE ITEGUE MENON HOSPITAL, DR. GHIRMAI BERHE, WHO IS BELIEVED TO HAVE HIS EYE ON THE JOB. TEWOLDE, WHO HAS BEEN TRANSFERRED TO SIDAMO PROVINCE SOUTH OF ADDIS ABABA, BELIEVES THAT HIS REPLACEMENT WILL REMAIN IN THE JOB ONLY FOR ABOUT EIGHT MONTHS AND THEN BE ASSIGNED ABROAD FOR RESIDENT TRAINING IN MEDICINE, AT WHICH TIME HE SUSPECTS THAT GHIRMAI MAY BE APPOINTED AS DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH. BOTH TEWOLDE AND GHIRMAI ARE CLOSE FRIENDS OF THE ONGEN AND OF E USG, AND GHIRMAI NO DOUBT WOULD DO AN

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EXCELLENT JOB (EVEN BETTER THAN TEWOLDE) IF APPOINTED. BEKELE HAS SERVED AT ASMARA FOR LESS THAN A YEAR AND HAD BEEN MAKING STRENUOUS EFFORTS TO CLEAN UP THE CUSTOMS DEPARTMENT. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT HE MAY HAVE STEPPED ON SOME IMPORTANT TOES IN THESE EFFORTS. TEWOLDEBERHAN IS AN OLD ADVOCATE OF ERITREAN UNITY WITH ETHIOPIAN AND HITHERTO HAS OCCUPIED A PRIVILEGED POSITION AS A LOCAL SUPPORTER OF THE EMPEROR. HE HAS HAD SERIOUS RIVALRIES WITH MAMMO, AND MAMMO IN EFFECT HAS BEEN THE PREDOMINANT FIGURE IN THE FIELD OF PUBLIC INFORMATION, ESPECIALLY DURING THE PAST YEAR. BOTH HOWEVER, ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE HAD SERIOUS POLICY DISPUTES NOT ONLY BETWEEN THEMSELVES BUT ALSO BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUALLY AND INFLUENTIAL PERSONS IN ADDIS ABABA.

4. IN SUMMARY, THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE POSITION OF LEADING POLITICAL PERSONALITIES IN ERITREA APPEAR TO BE AT A TURNING POINT, WITH A CURRENT INTERMEZZO PRESAGING A WHOLLY NEW ACT.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 27 JUL 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 29 JAN 1974
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974ASMARA00051
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 XGDS(1)
Errors: n/a
Film Number: P750001-1063
From: ASMARA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740175/abbrzbxz.tel
Line Count: 154
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 AUG 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <27 AUG 2002 by shawdg>; APPROVED <10 DEC 2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INTERNAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING ERITREA
TAGS: PINT, PINS, ET
To: STATE
ADDIS ABABA
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005